

Renewables cut Europe's carbon emissions by 10% in 2015, says EEA

European Environment Agency reports solar and wind is reducing fossil fuel dependency but clean energy capacity still not growing fast enough



A solar plant in El Bonillo, Albacete province, Spain. The EU is on track to achieve its goals of a 20% emissions cuts and 20% renewable energy share by 2020. Photograph: Pablo Blazquez Dominguez/Getty Images

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A surge in the use of wind and solar energy helped [Europe](#) to cut its fossil fuel consumption and greenhouse gas emissions by about 10% in 2015, an authoritative new report has found.

[Energy](#) use from renewables rose to 16.7% of Europe's total, up from 15% in 2013, and accounted for 77% of the continent's new power capacity.

But the clean energy burst is still not moving fast enough to prevent a "lock-in" of already-commissioned fossil fuel capacity, which will otherwise transform into stranded assets.

It was also unevenly spread across Europe, with renewables expanding to take up 30% of the power load in many Scandinavian countries, but only 5% in Malta.

The UK had Europe's seventh best record for the intensity of its greenhouse gas emissions, but was a mid-table performer in terms of emissions per capita, according to figures compiled by the European Environment Agency (EEA).

Mihai Tomescu, who authored [the EEA study](#), said Europe's renewable roll-out was accelerating, but not fast enough to halt global warming at 2C.

"The current level of effort needs to be stepped up and this is not necessarily going to happen without additional focus," he told the Guardian.

The EEA's report suggests that the EU [is broadly on track to achieve its goals of 20% emissions cuts](#) and 20% renewable energy share by 2020.

But a more challenging target for 2050 – of reducing emissions by at least 80% – will require acceleration after 2030, when tough decisions [about phasing out internal combustion engines and oil supplies](#) will have to be taken.

James Watson, the chief executive of SolarPower Europe, which represents Europe's solar photovoltaic industry, said that today's figures were in line with a 50GW spike in global solar capacity last year.

"This is a good start and we must be positive about that but if we are truly to meet our obligations under the Paris agreement, we will need to see a much faster growth of renewables and a commensurate, much faster reduction of fossil fuels, and coal power in particular," he said.

Renewables have replaced 100m tonnes of oil equivalent electricity generation this decade, but will only need to replace 20m tonnes in the 10 years ahead, according to SolarPower Europe's analysis.

Tomescu noted that Europe's growth in renewable energy was already coinciding with a drop in fossil fuel consumption. "In broad terms, we are talking about a substitution and this has an impact not only on import dependency but also avoided greenhouse gas emissions," he said.